

There's Black People in Milwaukee

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Documents given to the Faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art & Art History.

2021

Approved by Committee Members: Hong-An Truong, Lien Truong, and Deepanjan "Deep" Mukhopadhyay

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There's Black People in Milwaukee

"No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of the shark"

— WARSHAN SHIRE, "HOME"

Wait, there's Black people in Milwaukee? A question that I have been asked on several occasions, mostly when I' am traveling outside of the city. The question is so common for me, that I decided to ask other Black Milwaukeeans if they too have been asked this question. Black folks are everywhere. What is it about Blackness and Milwaukee, WI that doesn't seem to fit for people?

There's Black People in Milwaukee is a multimedia project that declares an existence of a vibrant Black community with an extraordinarily rich and nuanced history. Overtime these histories have become silenced. Redlining practices, unequal education, and high incarceration rates have aided in the burial of a community's history. In his seminal text "Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History," Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes, "silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance). *There's Black People in Milwaukee* begins at the construction of an archive.

Gathering photographs from various sources, I developed an image archive that situates Black communities in Milwaukee, WI. I began with family photo albums. The albums are points of departure for understanding the broader socio-historical position of the millions of Black Americans who fled the south for the north. I am drawn to the ways that Black families continued to make home while moving from one to region to another. In *Image Matters: The Archive, Photography, and The African Diaspora in Europe*, Tina M. Campt writes "This archive of domestic photography enacts practices of what I call *diasporic homemaking* — practices that are critical to diasporic formation yet frequently overshadowed by an emphasis on diasporic mobility." Over 74,546 Black Americans lived in Milwaukee, WI in 1960, a 600 percent increase in population from 1940. By the nineties many of the good paying jobs had left, leaving the inner-city with little resources and a steady increase in crime. Poor media representation has continued to define Milwaukee's Black population. I sourced these images various media sources, social media (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter), and Google Maps.

John Langston Gwaltney focused on the "Core Black People" in his text *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America*. Ordinary working-class men and women defined their culture and their experience in the United States. Using Zoom, I employ a similar method of oral history. I begin with the question; have you ever been asked are their Black people in Milwaukee? These conversations allowed for Black Milwaukeeans to reflect upon and speak about their experiences in relation to the city. Teachers, social workers, nurses, students, veterans, nail techs, poets, and aestheticians speak candidly about their hometown. Multiple screens traverse time. The past and present happen simultaneously in hopes of arriving at a destination point called the future.

Historically cinema has played a role in rendering the Black body invisible. *Away in Wisconsin*, a travelogue film about the state of Wisconsin is an example of this. Narrator Jack Douglas speaks of the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, Lake Michigan, and the various cultures found throughout the state. However, the film silences the histories and voices of Wisconsin's Black communities. I transcribe a section from the film's narration. I give this narration to Black Milwaukeeans to create redaction poems. Each poet redacts the same narration. The participants are challenged to use existing language to create a new language and voice for how they see the city of Milwaukee. Agency is gained through the process of redaction. Douglas' voice is silenced and replaced by the voices of the marginalized. *Away in Wisconsin* plays on a continuous loop with the sound off and placed on the floor beneath the wall sized photo-text redaction.

Ultimately, this work represents my desire to understand how people perceive and understand Blackness as it relates to geography. Blackness is not homogenous. In fact, it is actually nuanced. Even if the stereotypes of Wisconsin were true, it wouldn't mean that Black communities would not exist there. There are Black people who own farms. There are Black people who drink and enjoy Miller. There are Black people who watch Brewer games, tailgate, and eat cheese. Black Milwaukee may not be known for being a cultural melting pot like New York City or an entertainment hub like Atlanta, but it is beautiful city with a strong community, and it is home. So, to answer the question there are Black people in Milwaukee.

2021 MFA Thesis Defense
University of North Carolina Chapel-Hill



By: Devon Smith

major [redacted] culture in [redacted] the most striking
architecture [redacted] found here [redacted]
[redacted] this [redacted] classic design stands as a
[redacted] mosaic [redacted]
[redacted] in massive [redacted]
[redacted]
pieces of glass and stone as modern as the
glass domes [redacted]
[redacted] and each [redacted]
[redacted] allows natural sunlight to
plants and blooming flowers [redacted] in the structure [redacted] these
[redacted] is [redacted] [Music] [redacted] floral
[redacted] make way for a [redacted] tall red light
[redacted] in [redacted] the place is [redacted]
most unusual house [redacted] to frolic in the warm Sun above.

There's Black People In Milwaukee





Great-Grandfather William Anderson



Mae In the midst of a Summer, 2019

<https://vimeo.com/547755888>

The only memory that I have of my grandmother, is of
the morning my parents received the call about her
death.

Mae in the midst of a Summer, Still Image

Single-Channel

Total Runtime: 3 mins

2019

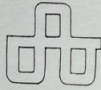


Mae in the midst of a Summer, Still Image

Single-Channel Video

Total Runtime: 3 mins

2019



CPC GREENBRIAR HOSPITAL

5015 S. 110TH STREET GREENFIELD, WISCONSIN 53228 414-425-6000 FAX: 414-425-6573

DAILY GOALS AND REFLECTION

Each day write:

1. My goal for groups today is:

To apply my thoughts on getting better company.

2. My goal for myself (Today I will be good to myself by):

going to a meeting

3. Today I affirm myself with the following:

I make decisions for myself.

4. Today I feel (mad, sad, glad, ashamed, hurt, afraid)

Shade, hurt

Each evening reflect and write:

1. Did I make progress towards my goals today? If yes, what helped you? If not, what prevented or stopped me?

2. My best accomplishment today was:-

3. If you had a pass today, share the events of your pass. Were there any problems the group can help you with? Did you attend a meeting?

MEMBER WISCONSIN HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

(OVER)

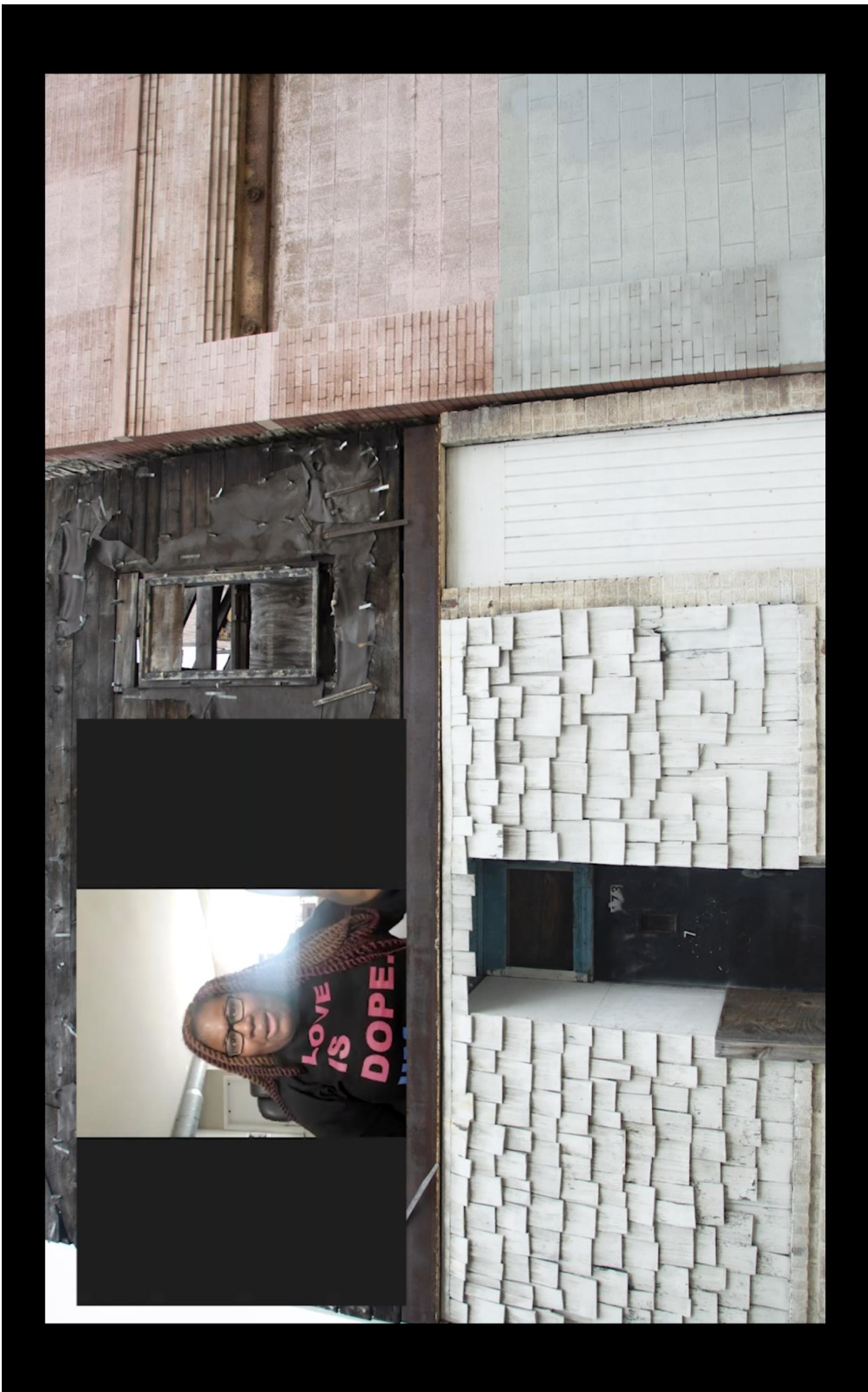
Mae Ethel Turner

Page from Rehab Journal, 1993

5/7/93



Mae Ethel Turner

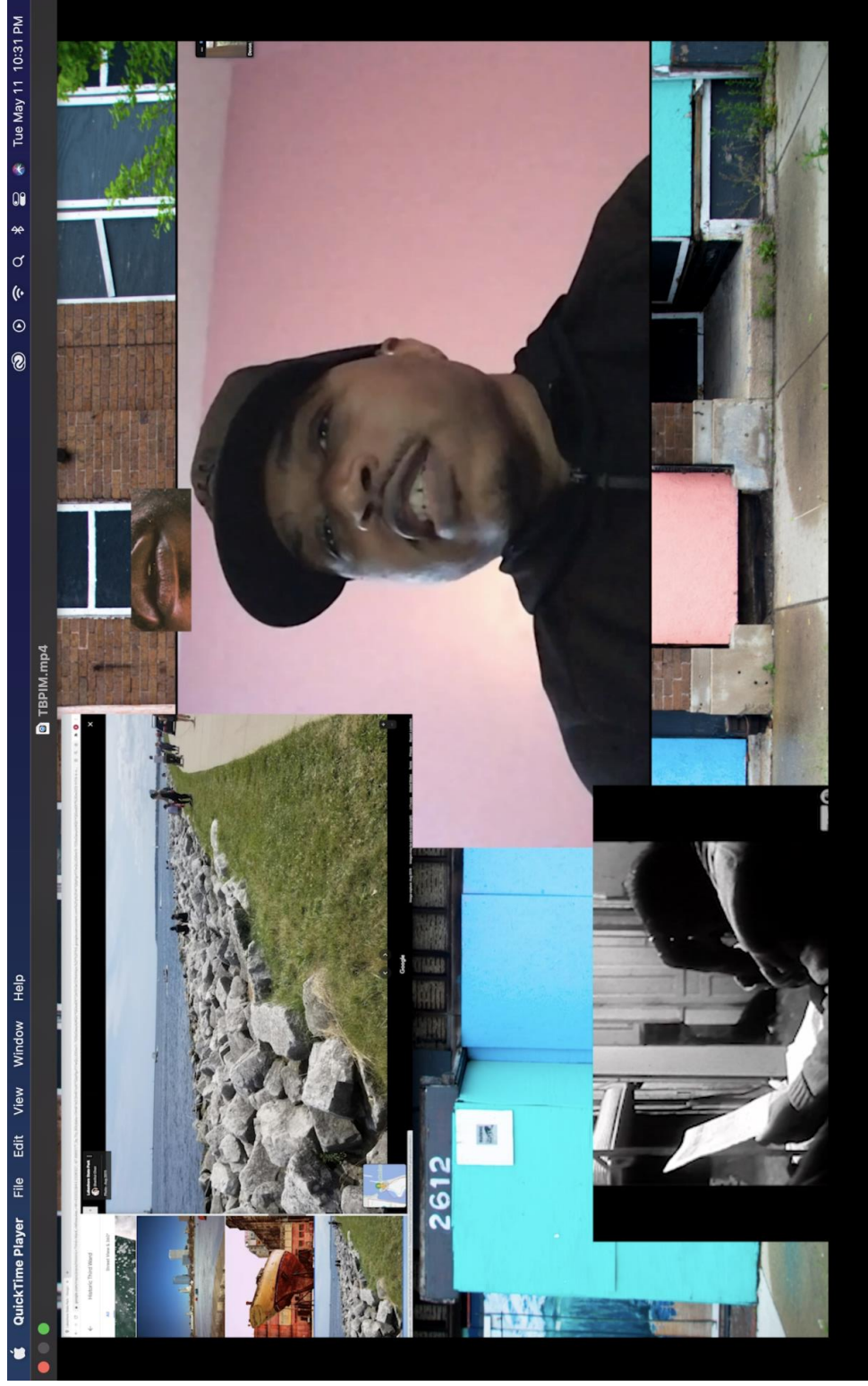


There's Black People In Milwaukee Conversation, Still Image

Single-Channel Video

Total Runtime: 23 mins

2021



There's Black People In Milwaukee Conversation, Still Image

Single-Channel Video

Total Runtime: 23 mins

2021



A Bit of This A Bit of That, Still Image

Single-Channel

Total Runtime: 8 mins

2021



A Bit of This A Bit of That, Still Image
Single-Channel
Total Runtime: 8 mins
2021

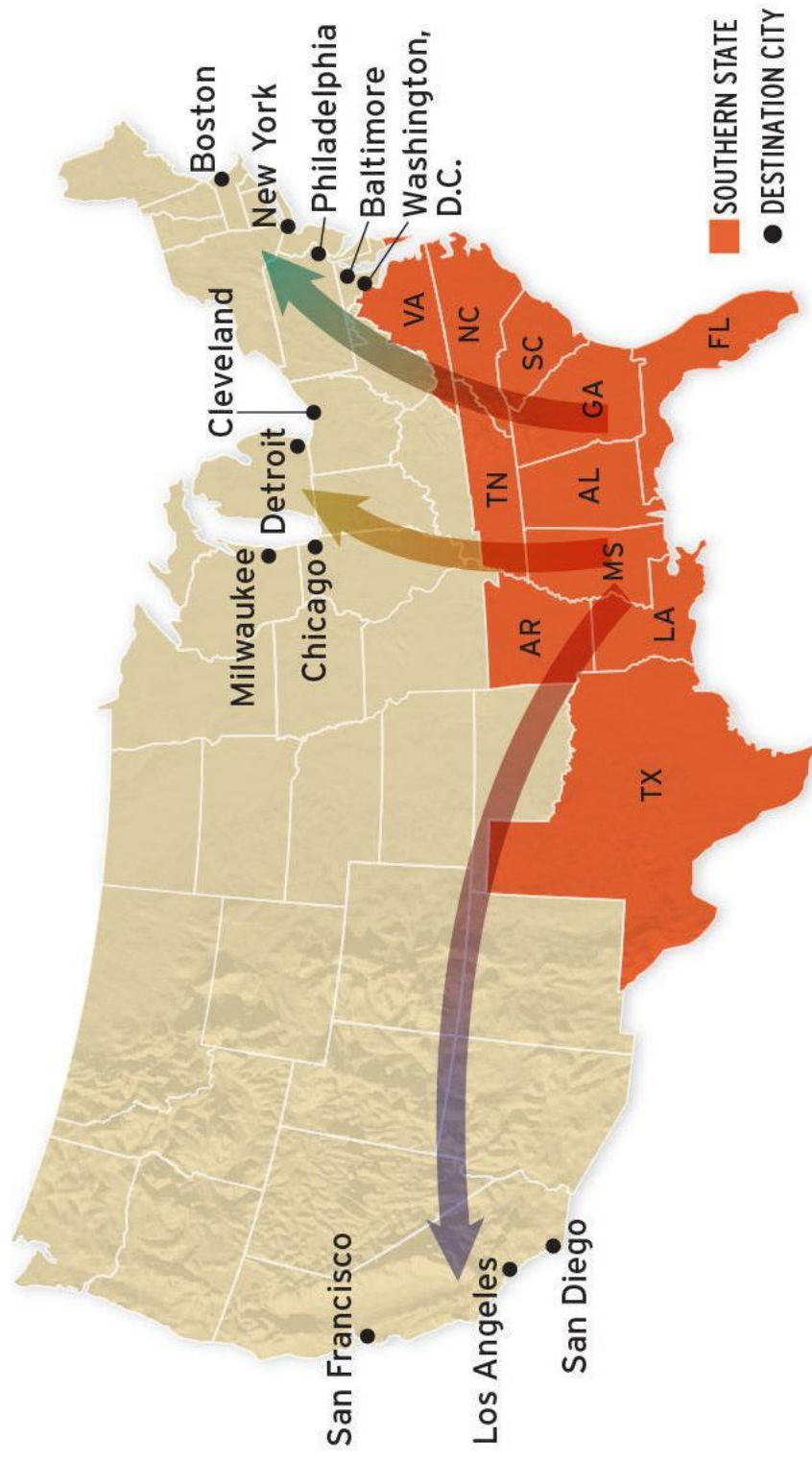


A Bit of This A Bit of That, Still Image

Single-Channel

Total Runtime: 8 mins

2021



Scholastic Graphic sourced from the Philadelphia Tribune



If Sun-Ra had a Son Somewhere in Space, 2020

<https://vimeo.com/548143250>

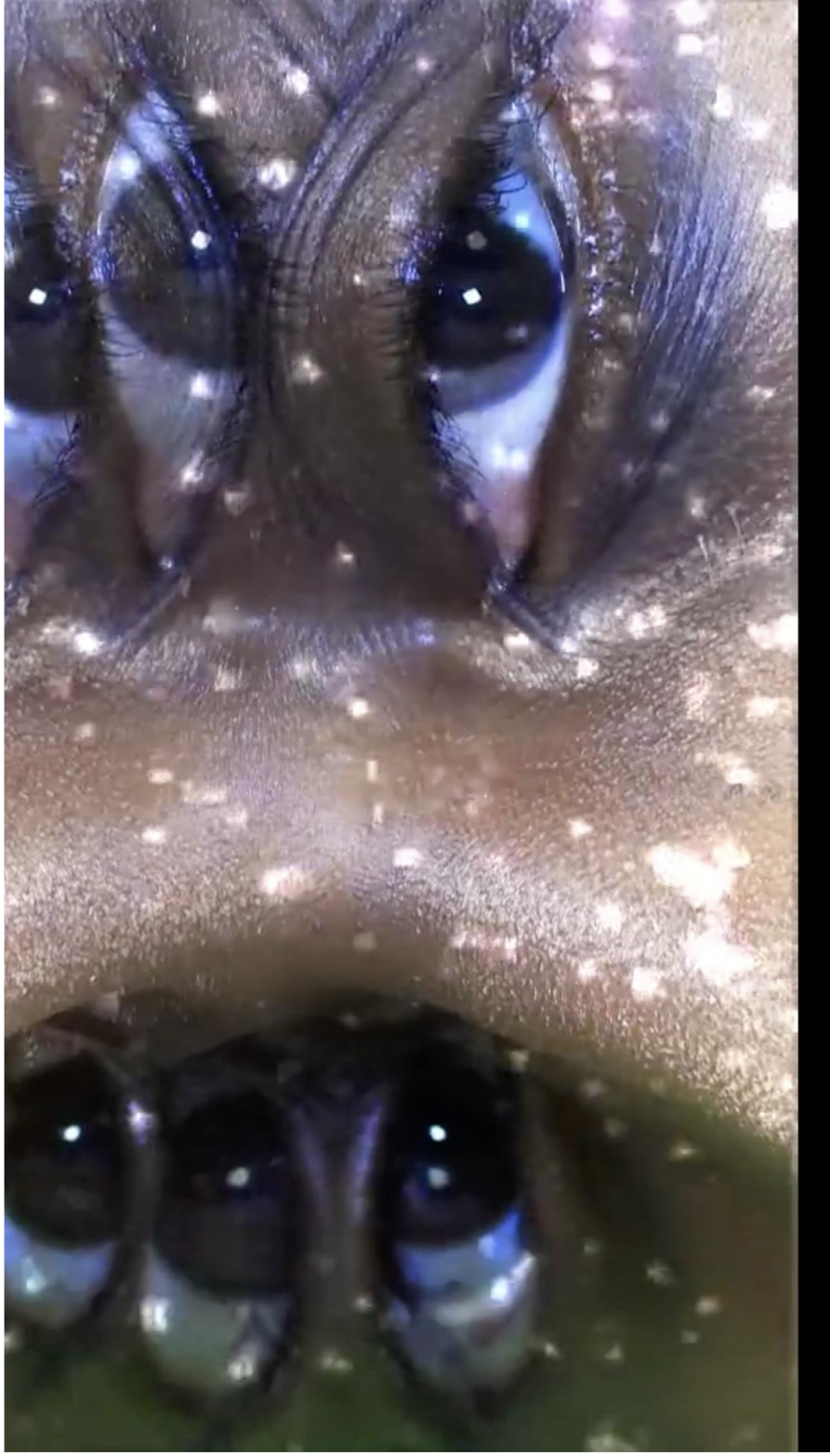


If Sun-Ra had a Son Somewhere in Space, Still Image

Single-Channel

Total Runtime: 2 mins

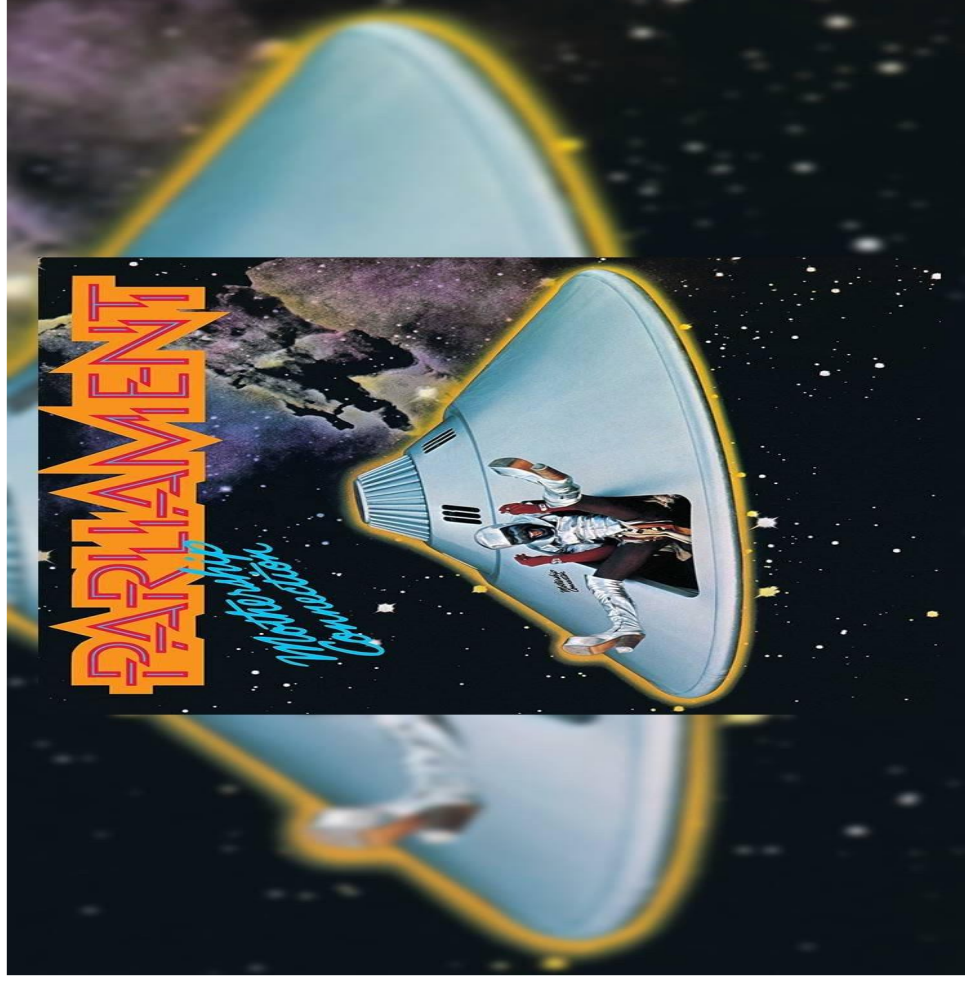
2020



If Sun-Ra had a Son Somewhere in Space, Still Image
Single-Channel
Total Runtime: 2 mins
2020



Artist: Sun Ra and His Arkestra
 Title: In The Orbit of Ra
 Date: 2014
 Medium: Jazz
 Source: www.pitchfork.com



Artist: Parliament
 Title: Mothership Connection
 Date: 1975
 Medium: Funk
 Source: www.rockpasta.com



Soul Music, GIF

Single-Channel Video

Total Runtime: 4 mins

2020



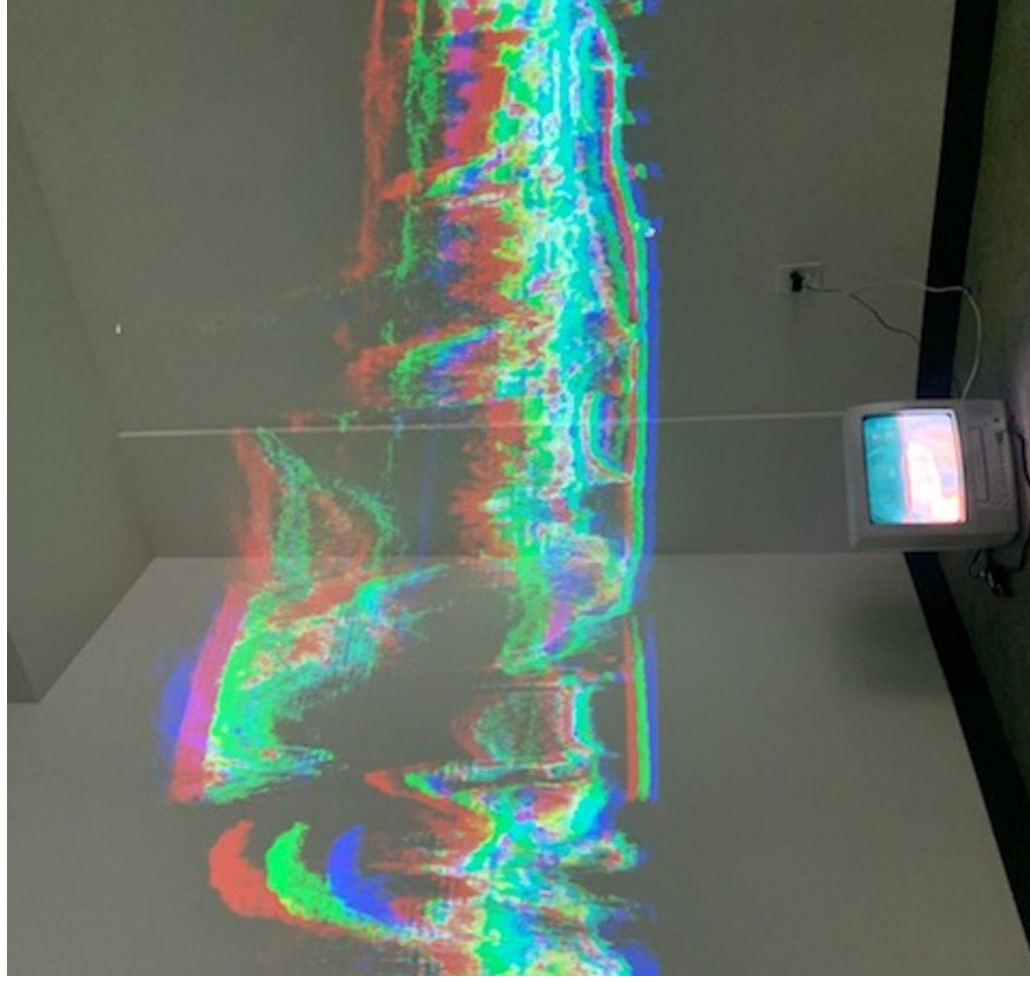
*Soul Music, Still Image
Single-Channel Video
Total Runtime: 4 mins
2020*



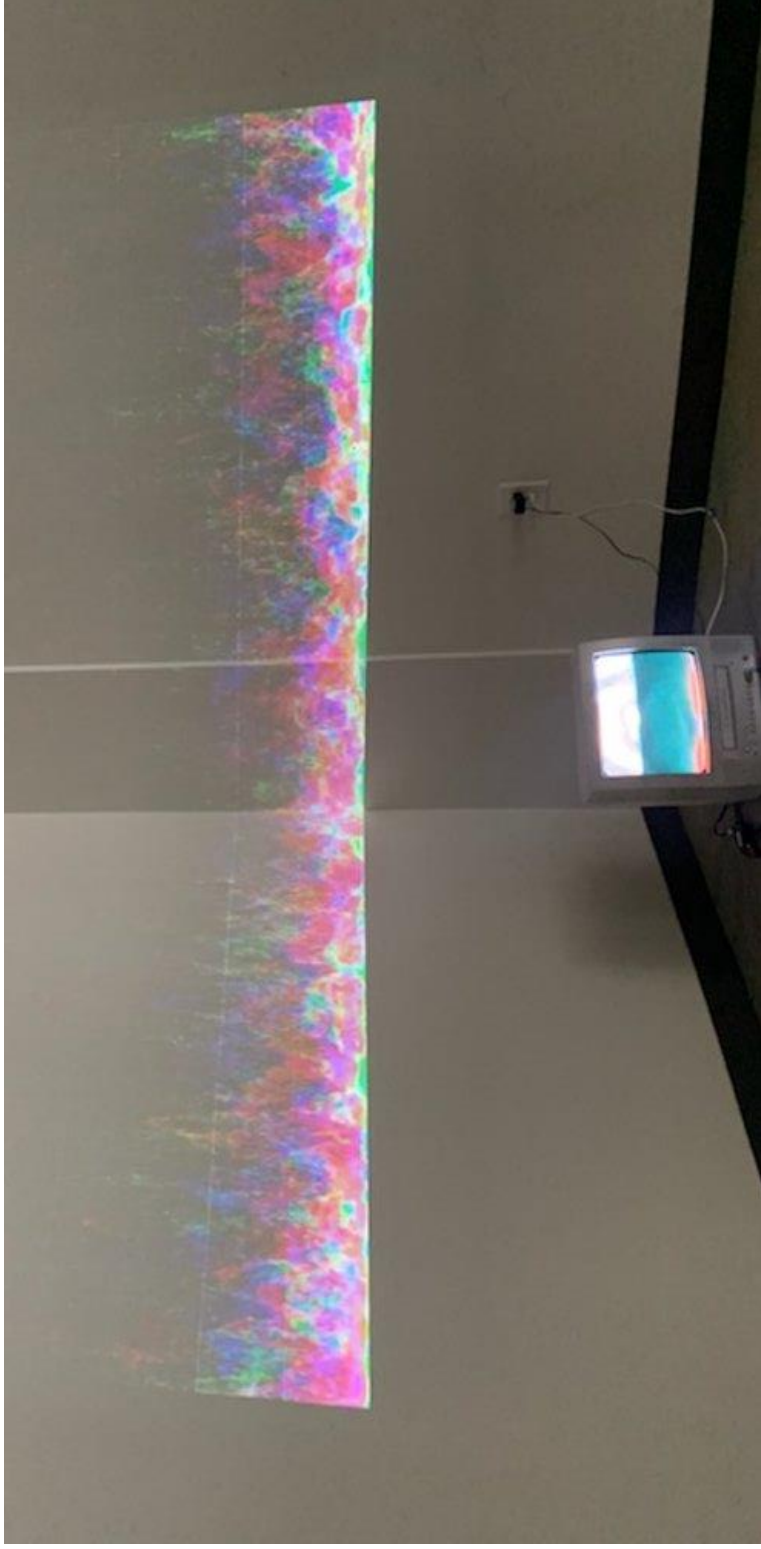
Soul Music, Still Image
Single-Channel Video
Total Runtime: 4 mins
2020



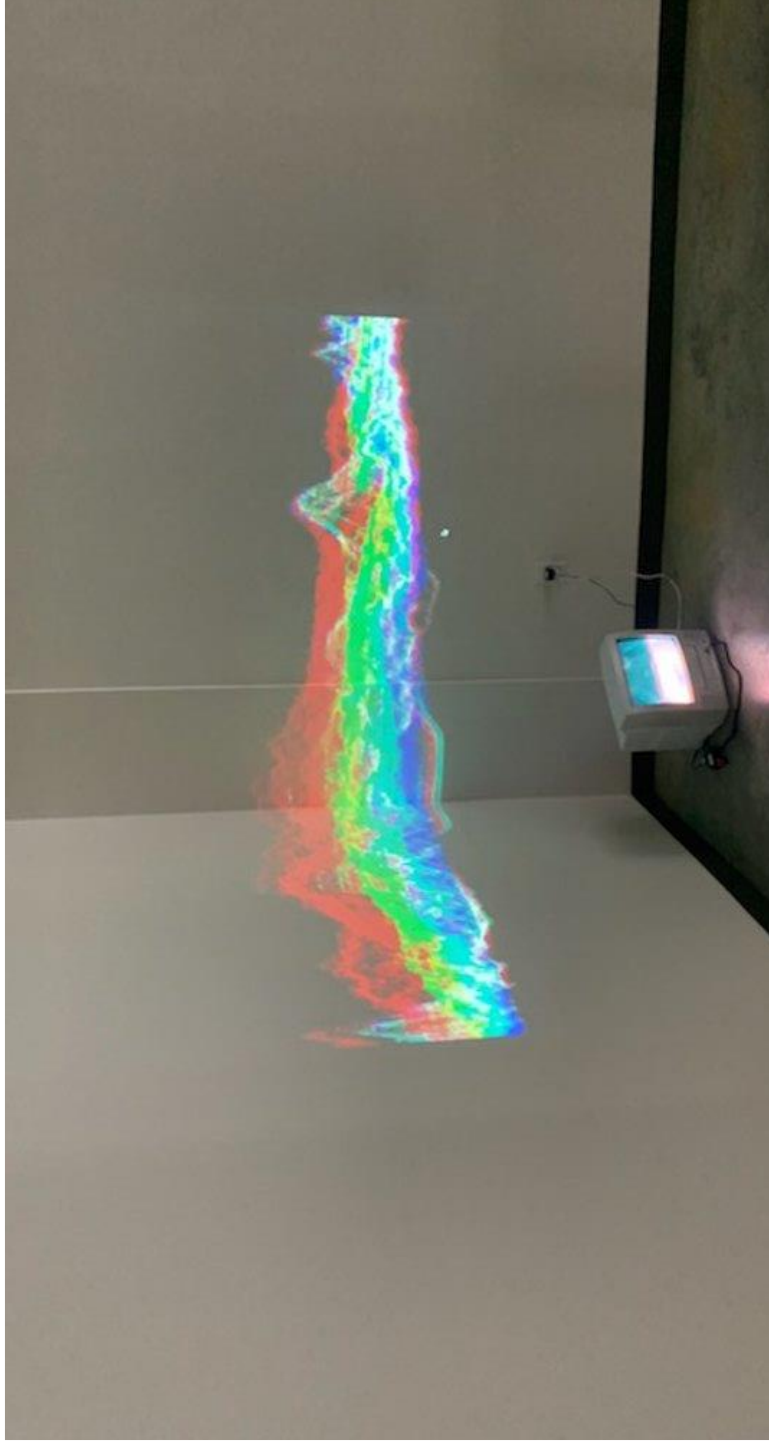
Soul Music, Still Image
Single-Channel/Video
Total Runtime: 4 mins
2020



Soul/Music RGB, Still Image
Video Installation with CRT Monitor
2020



Soul/Music RGB, Still Image
Video Installation with CRT Monitor
2020



Soul/Music RGB, Still Image
Video Installation with CRT Monitor
2020



There's Black People In Milwaukee
Video Installation
Single-Channel Video
2021



Title: *Away In Wisconsin*

Still Image

Year: 1960

Medium: Found Footage Video

Sourced: www.youtube.com



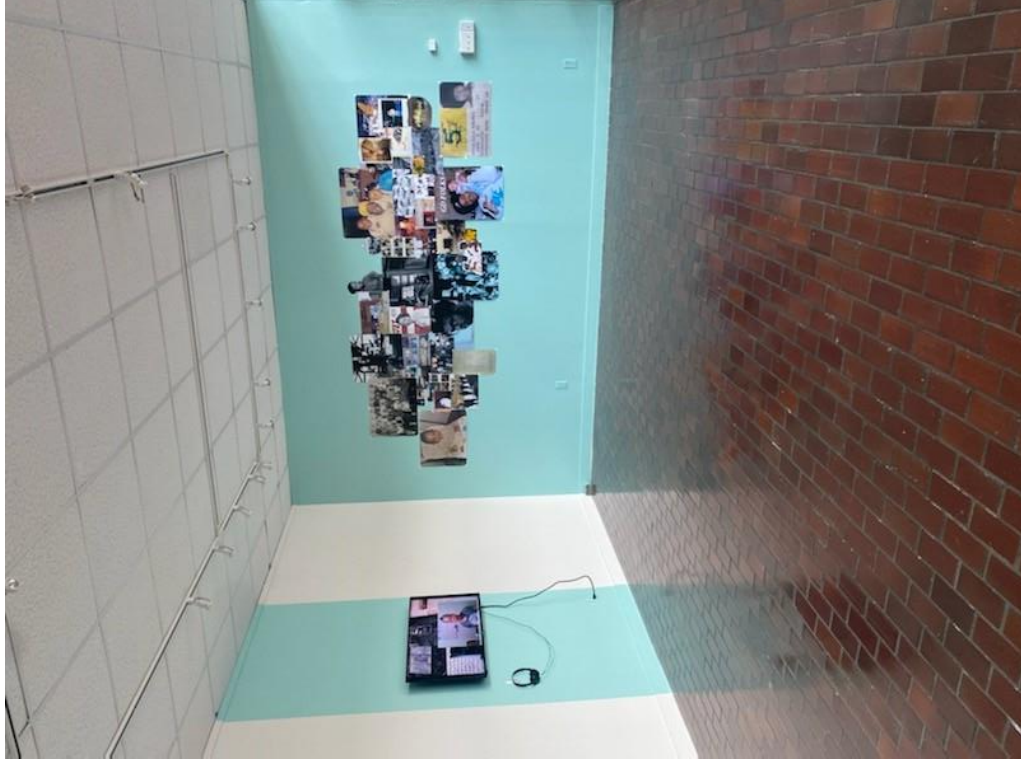
Title: *Away In Wisconsin*

Still Image

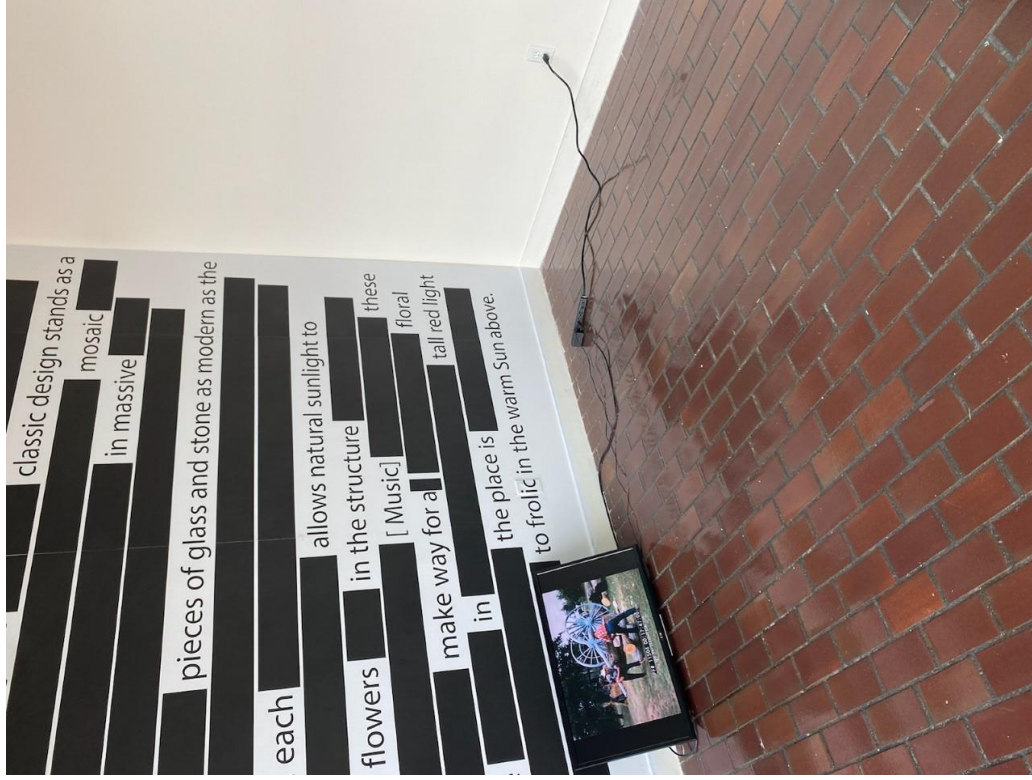
Year: 1960

Medium: Found Footage Video

Sourced: www.youtube.com



There's Black People In Milwaukee
Video Installation
Single-Channel Video
2021



There's Black People In Milwaukee
Video Installation
Single-Channel Video & Photo Text
2021

ture in [REDACTED] t
und here [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] this [REDACTED] class
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] in r
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] pieces of glass and sto
[REDACTED]
and each [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] allows natur
ng flowers [REDACTED] in the structure
[REDACTED] [Music] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] make way for a [REDACTED]

There's Black People In Milwaukee
Installation
Photo Text
2021

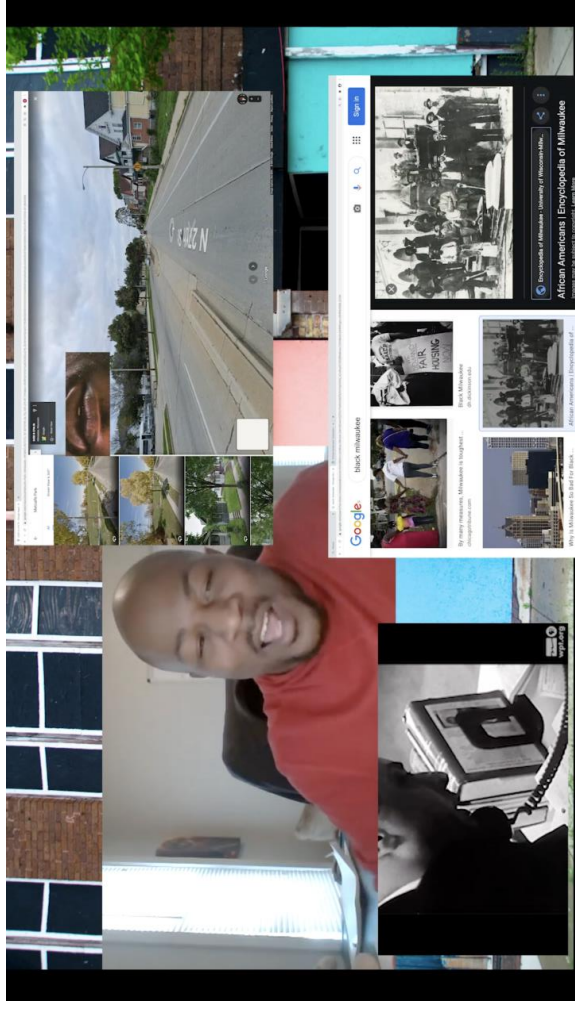


There's Black People In Milwaukee Conversation, Still Image

Single-Channel Video

Total Runtime: 23 mins

2021



There's Black People In Milwaukee Conversation, Still Image

Single-Channel Video

Total Runtime: 23 mins

2021

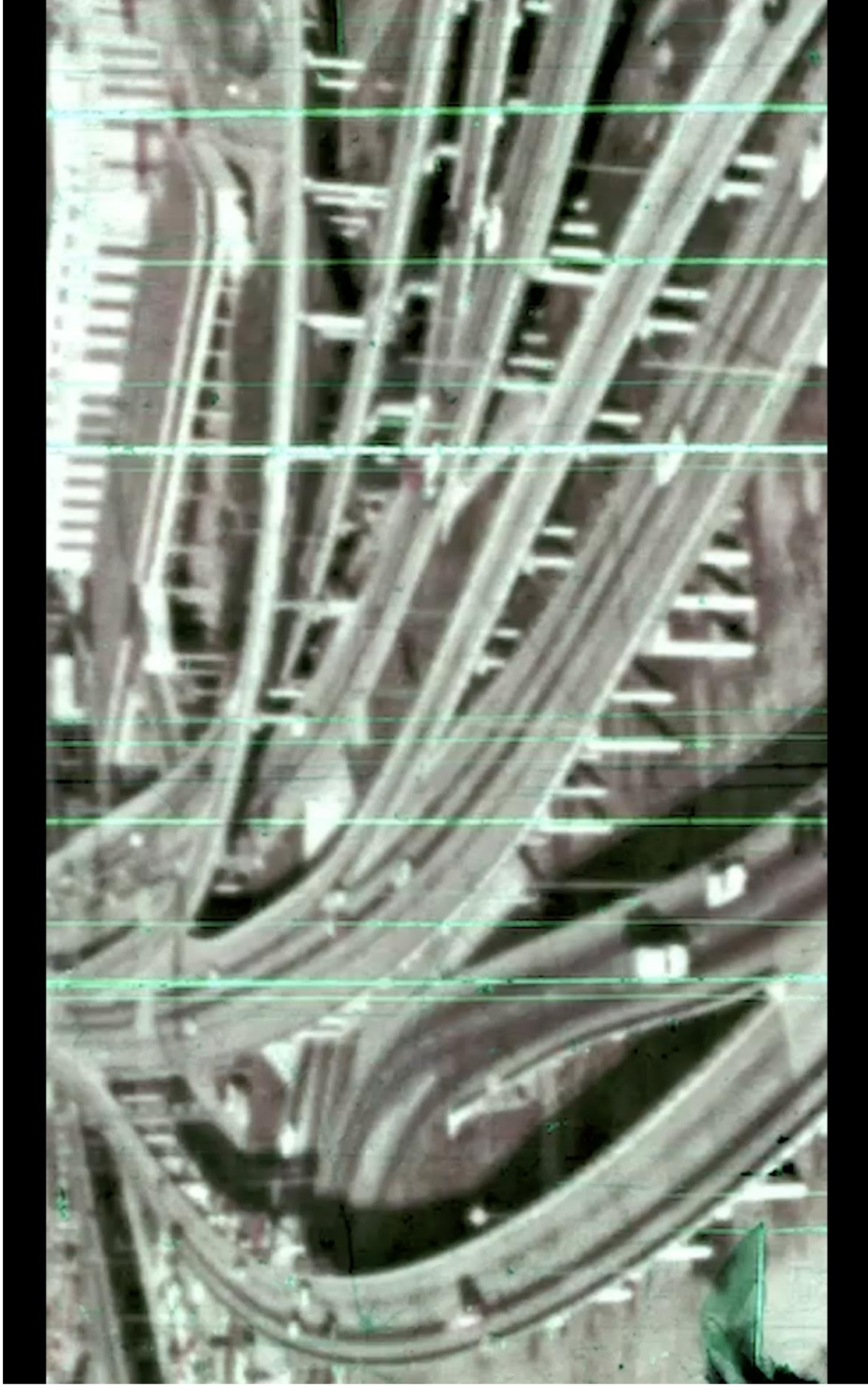


Opportunity Zone: Meditation on Migration, Still Image

Single-Channel Video

Total Runtime: 5 mins

2020

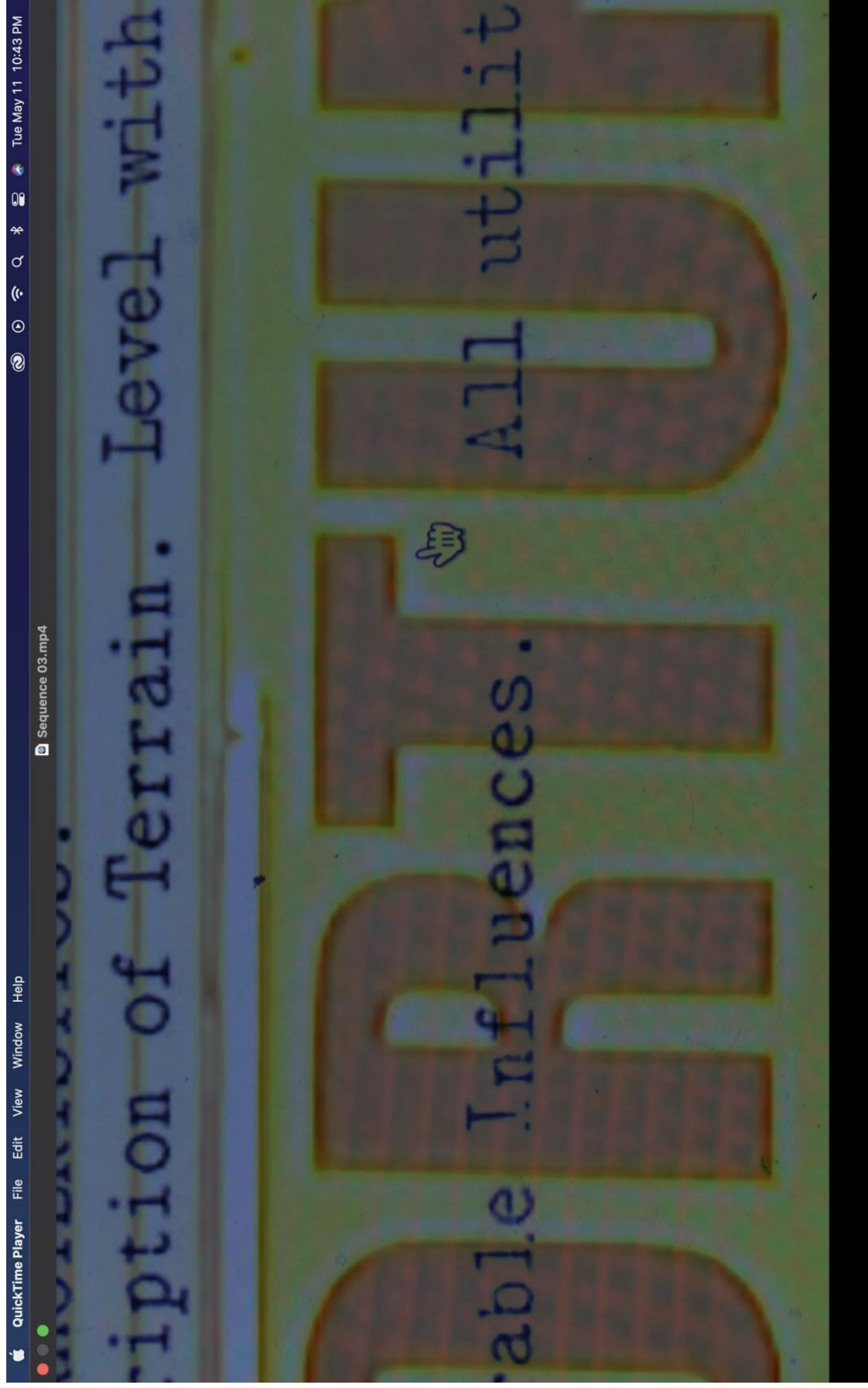


Opportunity Zone: Meditation on Migration, Still Image

Single-Channel Video

Total Runtime: 5 mins

2020



Opportunity Zone: Meditation on Migration, Still Image
Single-Channel Video
Total Runtime: 5 mins
2020



Opportunity Zone: Meditation on Migration, Still Image
Single-Channel Video
Total Runtime: 5 mins
2020

Thank you